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Awesome Decisions By Marquis Childs

Foreign Policy Imposes Heavy Burdens

IN THE course of trying to agree on the awesome decisions that must be taken for Europe and Asia, the principal members of the Eisenhower Administration put in very long hours. What happened one day recently could not be called typical, but in the demand it made on seven or eight men it is fairly characteristic.



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A Cabinet breakfast at 8 a. m., opened with prayer, was the first order of the day. The orange juice had scarcely been served before the President started the discussion of major problems facing the Administration. Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson talked about his trip to Texas and the serious drought condition in the Southwest.

He told the Cabinet that a condition of near panic had existed among cattle growers who watched ranges wither under the fierce sun while cattle prices dropped. After he detailed the steps his department had taken to meet the situation and reassure cattlemen, the President warmly congratulated him.

Quickly the discussion turned to Korea and the difficulty of obtaining a truce in the face of the stubborn opposition of President Syngman Rhee of the South Korean Republic. But this discussion was necessarily tentative since the Cabinet breakfast had been arranged at the early hour to make time for a meeting of the National Security Council.

THAT NSC meeting will rank as one of the most important

in the council's history. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had gone off for a long weekend to his retreat, Duck Island in the St. Lawrence River. The Undersecretary of State, Walter Bedell Smith, sat in his place. Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson, also on a brief vacation, was represented by Deputy Secretary Roger M. Kyes.

With President Eisenhower presiding, the council for nearly four hours wrestled with the dilemma of Korea and the stalemated effort to get a truce. The conclusions reached are, of course, top secret. But the nature of at least two negative decisions can be outlined, since with the turn of events they are likely soon to become public in any event.

First some of the thinking that influenced the position of the Truman Administration on Korea was definitely ruled out. This was to the effect that a continuation of the stalemate, with American troops holding at least part of the line, might be the lesser of many evils in view of America's position of world responsibility. One heard from officials in the previous Administration the suggestion of a parallel between the job of the British in defending the frontier of India in the nineteenth century and the job of America in indefinitely holding back communism in Korea in the twentieth century.

But the commitments of modern war, in terms of men and machines, are so costly that, in view of the men around the table, the analogy does not hold. So prolongation of the stalemate is out.

THE SECOND conclusion was that the United States could never allow President Rhee to dictate its foreign and military policy. Therefore re-

gardless of what turn the truce negotiations take, American forces if they fight at full scale again in the Korean peninsula will not be fighting for the Rhee government.

Present at the NSC meeting was Gen. Omar N. Bradley, retiring chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Just four months before, on March 2, Bradley in a major address had outlined the alternatives before the country with respect to Korea. These alternatives, the most drastic being air and naval war against the Chinese mainland, were canvassed.

It is hardly necessary to add that the talk was for the most part of a grim nature. No responsible person in the Administration has ever seriously considered acceding to Rhee's demand that the United States automatically resume fighting if agreement on Korea's unification is not reached within 90 days by a political conference to follow a truce. There is great hesitation on any agreement that would seem to commit this country to fight later in the event of any action that Rhee would decide was aggression against South Korea.

Rhee's demand that the U. N. forces fight to the Yalu River is seen as an invitation to indefinite war not on a limited but on a fairly large scale. Once the Yalu was reached that 800-mile line would have to be garrisoned. Garrisoned by whom? Inevitably, policymakers here believe, American forces would have to take part in that garrisoning.

To all concerned, one thing is now painfully obvious. There is no one decision that is right beyond all others. There are only choices which are less perilous than other choices.

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